

CHINATOWN/LEATHER DISTRICT CENTRAL ARTERY ADVISORY COMMITTEE**MEETING SUMMARY – PARCEL 24, MEETING #7, JANUARY 26, 2004
ST. JAMES CHURCH, 125 HARRISON AVE., CHINATOWN**

Stephanie Fan, Co-chair of the Chinatown/ Leather District Central Artery Neighborhood Advisory Committee, welcomed everyone and wished them a Happy New Year. She asked everyone to briefly introduce him or herself, and then before starting the bulk of the meeting, she asks for updates from the MTA regarding the question at the last meeting on a parcel of land in Newton.

Bill Tuttle, MTA, reviewed the question, which was regarding a sale of land in Newton. In Spring 1996, the 2-acre parcel in Newton (by Interchange 16) was sold for a nominal value for the construction of a 20-unit affordable housing development for victims of domestic violence. Originally, there was a standard Request for Proposals (RFP) for the sale of that parcel, but it was withdrawn. The parcel was then transferred to the Newton Housing Authority, who then transferred the land to another non-profit organization for development.

Fan then introduced Bruce Ehrlich, BRA, to respond to a question about the meeting notes from the November 24th meeting. Ehrlich stated the revision of a sentence in the previous meeting summary that oversimplified comments that implied that the Metropolitan was not a good example of program and financing that could be replicated. While the Metropolitan was unique in its complexity and subsidy package, it provides a good example of what might be achievable for Parcel 24 with the similar use of a combination of subsidies (both internal and external). (A revised Meeting Summary from the Nov. 24th meeting is available upon request.)

Fan then proceeded through the agenda to walk through the Rough Draft of portions of the Development Guidelines. (See attachment for version discussed at this meeting.) There were no additional comments on the Introduction and Urban Context sections. In the Site Description, it was requested that additional historical information be added to the second bullet explaining why the community desires more affordable housing. (Henry Yee specifically stating that his goal was for the greatest numbers of very low-income units mixed with middle-income units.) It was also requested that the approximation of 300 units previously existing on Parcel 24 be checked.

In the Background section, additional language explaining the relationship of height and FAR was requested in the first bullet. There were few comments on the second and third bullets, with some clarification on the relationship of height in feet to number of floors of residential.

Fan continued through the Goals & Objectives of the draft, which reflected more of an outline that included the Design Principles shown at the previous two meetings. Skipping over the Housing section to be discussed later in the meeting, Fan asked about open space in the middle portion of the parcel.

Comments regarding Open Space in the middle portion of the parcel:

- Could there be a way to have some open space without dedicating a portion for a park (since Parcel 23D is already a park) that could be used as residential?
- A park in the middle would help maintain a more residential character for the street.
- Green space that's open to the public would be desirable since there is so little in Chinatown.
- A park at this point would also create an east-west pedestrian and visual connection from Harvard Street through the parcel to the Albany Street side that will lead to the South Bay Study Area.
- There is a significant grade change from Hudson Street to Albany Street (about 20').

Fan continued through the outline, which contained design principles generally agreed upon at previous meetings. The last heading, Parking, drew several questions and comments.

Questions & Comments regarding Parking:

- Clarification of parking being "underground" versus "below-grade" since there is a grade difference on each side of the parcel.

- Would it be possible to rent additional spaces to help with affordability? (Ehrlich responded that parking construction can be complicated, and constructing more parking spaces may actually create additional financial issues to a developer.)
- Parking is currently a problem, and a lower parking ratio would make things worse.
- There should be sufficient parking for the residents and their visitors but public transit should be encouraged.
- The existing parking ratio on Hudson Street is less than 0.5, so if the ratio for Parcel 24 is at least 0.5, it should be enough for those at Parcel 24.
- This area is within the Boston's Parking Freeze, meaning that there is a fixed number of public parking spaces (different from residential guest or visitor spaces) for the entire downtown (so it would be difficult to add any public spaces).
- Weekend problems are from those coming regionally who aren't willing to pay for parking and take up residential spaces – some of the housing development parking lots are not full during the night.
- The Parcel 24 site has physical constraints that make constructing on-site underground parking difficult (the narrow width of the site). It may not be realistic to ask this parcel to create parking for more than its own uses.
- What are the parking ratios of surrounding housing developments? (To be followed up by the BRA.)
- Cars are currently illegally parked on the retaining wall side of Hudson Street.
- Could Hudson Street actually be narrowed so that people cannot park on both sides?

Fan introduces an exercise to stimulate more specific discussion on the potential preliminary massing on Parcel 24. Categories were broken down addressing height (building on Kneeland St., building north of the open space, and building south of the open space), overall massing, and numbers of housing units.

Questions & Comments on Height:

- There appeared to be consensus that at Kneeland St., that building could be as tall as 75 Kneeland St. (approximately 155').
- The site south of the park (open space) may want to be higher, especially since at that part of the site, the ramp on the east side will leave the first 2 floors without windows or light. A 5-floor building would then have 3 floors of livable residential and 2 floors of another use.
- The ramp on the east side of the site is under construction and cannot be changed.
- Building on this site (regardless of exact height) will not create much shadow impact on adjacent buildings.
- Will the profile of the ramp/retaining wall on Hudson St. be the same, just shifted over? (Tuttle responded that it probably will not be exactly the same but similar.)
- The character of the Albany Street changes to a ramp south of the middle part of the site.
- Mitigating architectural and construction details will be expected.
- What about a massing like Rowes Wharf with open space that is built over?
- There should be a transition between southern end of site and Tai Tung buildings.

Questions & Comments on Density:

- People were leaning towards a less dense development with less overall gross square feet, though there was also some support for a project with greater square footage (over 325,000 gross SF).
- Less need for commercial and community use square footage.
- Desire for both more and less number of housing units.
- Suggestion that people generally understand FAR and height but also understand the desire to maximize the number of housing units.
- More units could be the desire for additional affordability.
- Potentially less density and more units with smaller units – which conflicts with wanting more family housing.
- Parking (underground) is not included in calculating FAR.

The statement “additional consideration of additional height/massing only for projects that provide exceptional design and/or affordability” will require additional discussion and specificity. The next meeting will continue with a similar exercise and discussion on affordable housing.

The next meeting is tentatively scheduled for March 1, 2004. There will be a South Bay Planning Study meeting on February 3rd, and the next Parcel 23D meeting is tentatively scheduled for February 23rd.